DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 343 EA 023 000

AUTHOR Murphy, Joseph
TITLE Educational Reform in the 1980s: Explaining Some Surprising Success. NCEL Occasional Paper No. 5.
INSTITUTION National Center for Educational Leadership, Nashville, TN.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Sep 90
CONTRACT RI17C80005
NOTE 33p.
AVAILABLE FROM Publication Sales, National Center for Educational Leadership, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 443 Gutman Library, 6 Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138 ($4.00).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Achievement Gains; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation; *Excellence in Education; Failure; Organizational Effectiveness; *Performance Factors; Program Effectiveness; *School Restructuring; *Success

ABSTRACT

Many of the first-wave reform initiatives of the 1980s have been successfully implemented on a widespread basis and are having an important influence on the schooling process. The reform movement was expected to fail because of strong financial, political, and organizational arguments. Reform initiatives were said to be insufficiently funded, lacking a comprehensive approach, employing inappropriate policy mechanisms and tools, and giving responses that were too indirect to be effective. Professional intransigence, deep-rooted norms in organizational culture, and the institutional, bureaucratic nature of loosely linked systems in schools also contributed to the movement's expected failure. Speculations on reasons for the reform movement's success are: (1) efforts built improvements on existing organizational structures; (2) changes rendered schools more receptive to reform than in the past; (3) arguments on organizational propositions were incongruent with the current school systems; and (4) shifts in values had redefined the context in which reform was enacted. (66 references) (EJS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

The National Center for Educational Leadership

ED332343

Educational Reform in the 1980s: Explaining Some Surprising Success

by

Joseph Murphy
Vanderbilt University

Occasional Paper No. 5

September 1990

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Miles

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EA 023 000

NCEL

The National Center for Educational Leadership

The National Center for Educational Leadership is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., Grant No. R117C80005. The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the funding agency.

Additional copies of this paper are available at a cost of $4.00 from:

The National Center for Education Leadership
Harvard Graduate School of Education
443 Gutman Library
6 Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138

Harvard Graduate School of Education
Gutman Library, 4th floor
6 Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 495-3575

George Peabody College of Education
Box 514
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, TN 37203
(615) 322-8014

The University of Chicago
Department of Education
5835 Kimbark Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637
(312) 702-1566

NCEL OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES

1. *Re-Thinking School Leadership: An Agenda for Research and Reform* by Lee G. Bolman, Susan Moore Johnson, Jerome T. Murphy, and Carol H. Weiss; Harvard University (February 1990)

   This paper presents a basic model of the relationship between leadership, situation, and outcomes. Personal characteristics of leaders and the situation in which leaders find themselves both influence what leaders do, which in turn influences the kinds of outcomes that they produce. Embedded in the model are three questions: "What is good school leadership?" "How does good school leadership come about?" and "What will good school leadership mean in the future?" Systematic ways of approaching these questions are also presented.

2. *Preparing School Administrators for the Twenty-First Century: The Reform Agenda* by Joseph Murphy; Vanderbilt University (May 1990)

   In the second wave of school reform reports and studies of the 1980s, much attention has been directed to issues of school administration and leadership. Yet, to date, no comprehensive analysis of these calls for changes in school administration has been undertaken. The purpose of this paper is to provide such a review. The goals of the paper are threefold: (1) to explain the reasons for the calls for reform of school administration, (2) to review the major studies and reports on education reform from 1982 to 1988 and (3) to discuss educational administration reform issues that need further attention.

3. *What Makes a Difference? School Context, Principal Leadership, and Student Achievement* by Philip Hallinger, Leonard Bickman, and Ken Davis; Vanderbilt University (June 1990)

   This paper addresses the general question, what makes a difference in school learning? We report the results of a secondary analysis of data collected as part of the Tennessee School Improvement Incentives Project. We utilized the instructional leadership model developed by researchers at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development to guide our analyses. This conceptual model makes provision for analysis of principal leadership in relation to features of the school environment, school-level organization, and student outcomes. The paper focuses on the following research questions: (1) What antecedents appear to influence principal leadership behavior? (2) What impact does principal leadership have on the organization and its outcomes? (3) To what extent is the Far West Lab instructional leadership framework supported empirically by the data collected in this study?

4. *The Teaching Project at the Edward Devotion School: A Case Study of a Teacher-Initiated Restructuring Project* by Katherine C. Boles; Harvard University (September 1990)

   School districts around the country are in the process of initiating projects to restructure their schools. A small but growing number of these restructuring projects have been initiated by teachers, but as yet little has been written documenting the experience of classroom practitioners involved in such efforts. The purpose of this study is to add teachers' voices to the literature on restructuring. This project restructured a portion of a school and altered the work of a group of third and fourth grade teachers.

5. *Educational Reform in the 1980s: Explaining Some Surprising Success* by Joseph Murphy; Vanderbilt University (September 1990)

In this paper issues of success and failure of reform initiatives are discussed from both sides of the aisle. The paper begins with a review of the financial, political, and organizational factors which normally support the position that reform measures are likely to result in few substantive improvements. Next the argument is made that educational reform recommendations have been surprisingly successful, and some speculations as to the reasons for this unexpected outcome are presented.

6. *New Settings and Changing Norms for Principal Development* by Philip Hallinger; Vanderbilt University and Robert Wimpelberg; University of New Orleans (January 1991)

Recently analysts have identified a variety of features that distinguish emerging administrative training programs from traditional ones. The rapid, but non-systematic growth in organizations providing administrative development services during the 1980's led to considerable natural variation in programmatic content as well as in organizational processes. In particular, significant variations emerged in the operation of state sponsored leadership academies and local principals' centers. The purpose of this paper is to analyze variations in current approaches to educational leadership development. The paper addresses three questions: (1) What is the range of variation among emerging staff development programs for school leaders on dimensions of program content and organizational process? (2) What can we learn from the naturally occurring variations in administrative development? (3) What are the most likely and promising directions for administrative development programs in the next decade?

7. *Images of Leadership* by Lee G. Bolman; Harvard University and Terrence E. Deal; Vanderbilt University (January 1991)

This project has undertaken a major study of the "frames", or orientations that leaders use to guide their understanding of their work. The investigators have developed a set of survey instruments to measure four leadership orientations (structural, human resource, political, and symbolic), and collected data from leaders approach their task constituents in both education and the private sector. Their research results show that the four leadership orientations do capture significant elements of how leaders approach their task, and that those leadership variables are significantly associated with effectiveness. The results further show that the variables which predict effectiveness as a *manager* are different from those that predict effectiveness as a *leader*. In particular, structural and rational orientations are primarily predictive of manager effectiveness. This research was reported at the AERA meeting in April, 1990.

To receive a copy of any of the above papers, send a check for ~~$2.00~~ $4.00/per paper to:

Harvard Graduate School of Education
The National Center for Educational Leadership
443 Gutman Library / 6 Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138

Please make checks payable to: **HARVARD UNIVERSITY**

Thank you.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THE 1980s: EXPLAINING SOME SURPRISING SUCCESS

by
Joseph Murphy

Trying to sort out the effects of the educational reform movement is difficult business indeed. The number of reform initiatives is overwhelming. States have selected different strategies to implement similar reforms (Timar & Kirp, 1988). Furthermore, the definition of impact (success and failure) is difficult to pin down, since it depends as much on the perspective of the analyst and the time of the observation as on pre-established standards. Still, certain patterns are discernable in discussions of reform effects. By and large, the literature suggests that, based on our understanding of previous attempts at change and because of glaring deficiencies in the strategies underlying current reforms, educational change in the 1980s should have emerged from its cocoon of public discontent, flown briefly and erratically, and departed leaving little noticeable influence on the schooling system. Yet many of the reform initiatives of the 1980s--especially wave 1 measures--have been successfully implemented on a widespread basis and are having an important influence on the schooling process. In addition, although it is too early to assess the effects of wave 2 and wave 3 reforms,[1] there is reason to believe that proposals

[1]A number of scholars have pointed out two distinct waves of educational reform in the 1980s (Green, 1987; Plank & Ginsberg). Recently, a few authors have begun to talk about a third wave of educational reform, one that is focused on "children's policy" (Hawley, 1988; Kirst, 1987; Odden, 1989). See Murphy (1989c) for an analysis of the metaphors, philosophies, assumptions, change models, and policy mechanisms for all three eras of educational reform.

such as school-based management and shared leadership may be more widely implemented than the general literature would have us believe.

In this article issues of success and failure of wave 1 reform initiatives are discussed from both sides of the aisle. The paper begins with a review of the financial, political, and organizational factors which normally support the position that reform measures are likely to result in few substantive improvements. Next the argument is made that educational reform recommendations have been surprisingly successful, and some speculations which account for this unexpected outcome are presented.

Why the Reform Movement was Expected to Fail

> A common theme of the literature on educational reform is that these large cycles of reform and reaction have had little effect on the way teachers teach, the way students are expected to learn, and the way knowledge is defined in schools ... most students of educational reform see these large, glacial changes as masking an enduring continuity in what teachers and students do in classrooms. "Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose," is carved over the archive of research on school reform (Elmore, 1987: 61).
>
> The effects of all this activity cannot yet be confidently judged, but there is reason to believe that the reforms will fall far short of their goals--and perhaps even be counterproductive (Chubb, 1988: 29).
>
> In short, state educational reformers (in the 1980s) appeared to face an army of skeptics and a consensus--at least among educators and educational researchers--that state education reform "would not work" (Odden & Marsh, in press).

Critics of the current reform movement have usually taken one of two paths to arrive at the conclusion that the reforms would not work. A number of analysts

have concluded that, because of their top-down nature, initiatives would likely fail to be implemented (Boyd, 1987). Worse, if they were implemented, they would not only fail to produce the outcomes claimed by their developers, but would also lead to many unintended negative consequences (Cuban, 1984; Sedlak, et al., 1986). Others maintained that, regardless of whether they were enacted, wave 1 reform measures would fail because they were limited (Hawley, 1988; Plank, 1987), left current organizational arrangements largely unaltered (Chubb, 1988), and failed to touch the central activity of schooling, the teaching-learning process:

> Not only does it (the standards-raising reform movement) ignore the personal nature of the learning and teaching processes and the power of either party to subvert them toward other ends, but it is also condescending because it implies that not only teaching and learning, but also teachers and learners, can always be manipulated toward predictable ends by altering rather superficial variables (Sedlak, et al., 1986: 185).

Financial Arguments

Supporting the positions of scholars in each of these camps are financial, political, and organizational explanations. On the financial front, it was held that insufficient funding (Jordan & McKoewn, in press; Rossmiller, 1986) would lead to widespread rejection of reform measures. Indeed, there is some evidence that this has occurred. For example, in 1988 nearly one-quarter of the districts in Illinois took preliminary steps toward initiating a lawsuit claiming that the State Board of Education was powerless to force them to implement mandated but unfunded reform proposals (*Education Week*, 17 February 1988, 11 May 1988). Other states have shifted funds for current reform initiatives from proposals adopted in the early

1980s (Walker, 1988) or simply ignored the knotty problem of where funding for programs would come from (Perry, 1988; Plank, 1987).

Political Arguments

On the political side of the ledger a host of positions have been developed to suggest why reform measures would miss the mark. There was a feeling that the absence of a comprehensive approach to change--the reliance on fragmented, disparate strategies (Timar & Kirp, 1988)--would hinder implementation. Plank (1987: 13) pointed out that the process of relying on commission reports to fuel the reform agenda insured that "little in the way of significant change" would occur.[2] There was also considerable support for the position that inappropriate policy mechanisms--regulations and compliance monitoring--were being employed (Chubb, 1988; Timar & Kirp, 1988). In addition, serious doubts were raised about the selection of specific policy tools to address recognized problems, for example, student retention rather than student remediation programs to address the problem of social promotion (Smith & Shepard, 1987). Finally, scholars questioned whether the responses to the problems were too small and too indirect to be effective and whether unexpected consequences might undermine targeted objectives (Cuban, 1984; Peterson, n.d.; Timar & Kirp, 1988).

---

[2]Plank's (1987: 15) point is that the inclusive process used in the formation of the Commission's "limit[s] reform proposals to those that can win the approval of all interested groups, with the consequences that changes in the structure and operation of state educational systems have not been seriously considered."

Organizational Arguments

The most pervasive rationale for the unlikely success of reform measures has focused on the organizational nature of schools, especially on the ability of highly bureaucratized systems simply to deflect initiatives and to "take shelter from reform by constructing routines" (Elmore, 1988: 75; also Timar & Kirp, 1988). This organizational explanation is comprised of a series of interrelated analyses. One of the simplest is that the adults who populate schools have too much to lose from changes and too few incentives to make them. *Intransigeance of professionals* would ensure that the reforms produced cosmetic changes at best. Depending on the biases of the particular analyst, board members, administrators, and teachers are all viewed as obstacles to reform:

> Significant gains in student achievement may well require basic changes in the ways schools are governed and organized--in the authority entrusted to them, the objectives imposed upon them, and the professional discretion they are granted. Such changes would, however, threaten the security of political representatives and education administrators whose positions are tied to the existing system and who now hold the reins of school reform ... their responsibilities would be radically changed and likely reduced under alternative systems of control, whose enactment they have enough political influence to prevent. The reforms that are most promising are therefore the ones least likely to be adopted (Chubb, 1988: 29-30).

> The Secretary's report reiterates his assault on the "education establishment," and teachers' unions in particular. Mr. Bennett blames the slow progress of reform on "the narrow, self-interested exercise of political power" by "those with a vested interest in the educational status quo" (Olson, 1988: 20).

Analysis of *organizational culture* has led others to conclude that the educational reform movement is unlikely to result in significant changes in schools.

According to this view, certain deep-rooted or "sacred" norms (Corbett, Firestone, & Rossman, 1987), exist in the general culture of education, e.g., egalitarianism, professionalism, and teacher autonomy (Lortie, 1975; Cusick, 1983). Other "sacred" norms are part of the cultures of particular schools (Corbett, Firestone, & Rossman, 1987). When reform initiatives conflict with these deep-seated macro and micro level values they are attacked and neutralized in much the same way that a body rejects transplanted organs. Shepard and Kreitzer (1987) have provided us with a good example of this conflict--between the control-oriented philosophy of the Texas Teacher Test for practicing teachers and the enduring value of teacher professionalism. Malen and Hart (1987) have also painted a portrait of this tension--between the merit-oriented, state-initiated career ladder program in Utah and the sacred values of teacher autonomy and egalitarianism:

> with rare exception, a proposal aimed at differentiating salaries, creating hierarchical positions, and generating opportunities for ongoing professional growth and career advancement has produced an egalitarian distribution of benefits, minimal staff differentiation, and support for familiar work patterns (Malen & Hart, 1987: 1).

Teachers simply readjusted and reinterpreted reform measures to be "more congruent with cherished norms and established practices" (Maelan & Hart, 1987: 35).

A third organizational explanation that predicts only marginal impact of reform measures is based upon our understanding of the *institutional character* of schools. Goffman (1969) and others who have discussed the institutional aspect of organizations shown that because "public schools are expected to provide universal

access, daytime custody, and education to large numbers of students who are, for the most part, required or expected to attend school regardless of their interest or aptitude for academic learning" (Elmore, 1987: 63), there is a need for batch processing of students. These requirements imposed upon schools almost guarantee that standard institutional routines--large groups of students performing similar activities at the same time--will control school operations. Reforms which threaten these routines (e.g., class periods of varying length) have very little chance of being successfully incorporated into schools. Without fundamental reconfigurations of institutional patterns, isolated efforts at reform simply cannot be grafted successfully onto schools.

Analyses of the *bureaucratic nature* of school organizations are also employed to explain how educational reforms are likely to be deflected (Frymier, 1987; Sizer, 1984).[3] The portrait of the school as a failed public monopoly is central to this line of explanation (Kearnes, 1988a, 1988b). Downs (1967) has shown how bureaucracies can evolve into organizations that displace system and client goals with strategies designed to enhance the welfare of the work force. Since the monopoly nature of schools provides few incentives to change (Boyd, 1983), reform initiatives (e.g., full-year school programs) that clash with the operant goals--maintaining the self-serving routines of employees--are rejected out-of-hand with

[3]It is also important to note that many reformers in this same group turn the discussion around and argue that the professional, not the bureaucratic, nature of schools may account for the failure of reform measures. According to this line of thought, schools are really professional organizations. As such, regulatory reforms are likely to fail because "they are incongruent with teachers' cultivated understandings and deliberate judgments about how to teach" (Elmore, 1987: 65).

little consideration of their potential impact on official organizational goals. In the words of Kearnes (1988b: 32), "results are sacrificied to bureaucratic convenience."

The most widely cited organizational rationale for the expected failure of the educational reform movement of the early 1980s draws upon our understanding of schools as *loosely linked systems* (Ginsberg & Wimpelberg, 1987). Research on change and improvement efforts as well as information about the success of reform measures in earlier periods of this century caused many to conclude that top-down reforms, especially regulatory ones, did not produce much improvement in the past and were unlikely to do so now (Odden & Marsh, in press, for a review; also Combs, 1988; Cuban, 1984; Sedlak et al., 1986). The fundamental building block of this position is that top-down reform is inconsistent with basic structural conditions in schools, i.e., loose coupling. Without tight connections among components of the organization, top-down change strategies that are not consistent with the predilections of personnel in those units, or that are not predicated upon their goodwill and support, can simply be ignored or implemented in form only:

> Both types of reform--the menancing and the benign--look much the same from inside a school. They look like someone else's ideas about what a school should be. Life in schools becomes an attempt simply to maintain a predictable existence in the face of periodic external disturbances ... (Elmore, 1988: 75).

Since it is exactly this state-directed, regulatory approach that has characterized wave 1 reforms (Coombs, 1987; Doyle & Hart, 1985; Mitchell & Encarnation, 1984), many critics have afforded them little chance of success.

This last group of analysts includes a subset who have concluded that reforms--no matter how meritorious--will yield meager returns because they are built upon and reinforce existing organizational arrangements (Chubb, 1988). In their view, because the reforms fail to acknowledge that the structure itself is, to a large extent, the cause of the problem (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Holmes, 1986), they are, by definition, more likely to lead to harm than good:

> Interest groups and elected officials have responded to the crisis in education by proposing reform packages that give the appearance of comprehensive, in-depth reform. When disaggregated, however, their common parts, as they affect the critical aspects of teaching, become too little and even potentially damaging (Sedlak, et al., 1986: 152).

> I don't think we've gotten to the heart of the problem yet. We're still talking about testing everybody and putting the screws on the existing system even more. The problem is the existing system. And until we face up to that unpleasant fact--that the existing system has to change--we're not going to get the kinds of changes that everybody wants (Sizer, in Olson, 1988: 20).

Why the Reform Movement May Succeed

> The most appropriate standards would be the specific recommendations included in *A Nation at Risk*. If progress were assessed on these terms, the reform effort would receive relatively high marks.
>
> Alternative standards would be the individual philosophies of such major public figures as former U.S. Secretary of Education William J. Bennett, or the advocates of a second wave of reform to follow *A Nation at Risk*, commonly described as "restructuring" or "teacher professionalism." By these standards, the reforms would fall far short of the stated objectives (Kirst, 1988: 40).

> These findings suggest that state education reform programs are likely having a more substantial impact on local practice than most have predicted. Indeed, the above studies document substantial impact across several dimensions, with nearly all impact "in line" with reform

> objectives. The major policy implication is that "state education reform is working" (Odden & Marsh, in press).

Kirst and Odden and Marsh raise the possibility that wave 1 reforms may be working better than critics have supposed. If this is the case,[4] then it is worth speculating a bit on why current critics may have missed seeing the phenomenon.[5]

Consistency With School Operations and Processes Linked to Achievement

One reason that many reform initiatives have been successful is that they built improvement efforts upon existing organizational structures--in the words of Goodlad (1984), they were designed to improve the schools we have. Although critics view this as a serious problem (Chubb, 1988; Elmore, 1987; Sizer, 1984), we maintain that the yields provided by the early reform agenda are partially attributable to the fact that they did not call for major upheaval of current operations (Hawley, 1988; Plank, 1987). They emphasized quantitative increases

---

[4]It is impossible to document the totality of indicators showing the impact of wave 1 reforms. Two states, however, (California and South Carolina) have been systematically tracking the effects of their reform packages for four years now. Both sets of assessments reveal that, while there is substantial room for improvement, many of the initiatives have: (1) been successfully implemented; (2) led to important changes in districts and schools; (3) raised targeted indicators of student performance; and (4) not, as many observers anticipated, left at-risk students behind (see especially Guthrie & Kirst, 1988; Grossman, Kirst, Negash, & Schmidt-Posnere, 1985; Odden & Marsh, 1988, in press; South Carolina State Board of Education, 1988; also Murphy, 1989a, 1989b for reviews of the equity issue.

[5]There is, of course, no doubt that some wave 1 reform proposals were probably better left unenacted, and that the implementation of others has been far from successful. We do not deny that those using other criteria to evaluate impact may reach different conclusions. Nor do we claim that different criteria (e.g., redistributing authority to teachers and parents) may not provide more appropriate measures of reform success or failure in the future. Yet, given these caveats, the evidence does suggest that educational reform in the 1980s is working better than expected. We also argue that rather than inhibiting second and third wave reform as many critics have argued, the wave 1 reform agenda is an essential stage in the path to a comprehensive, fundamental reform of American public education.

in areas such as curriculum requirements and time for learning.[6] Revisions were not predicated upon dramatic improvements in the quality of people employed in schools nor upon the ways they worked or the task structures under which they operated--revisions that would be difficult to achieve in the short run and unlikely to occur in a system marked by incremental change.

After studying all the analyses of the problems in these early reform proposals it is easy to lose sight of one of the most important factors behind their successful implementation and subsequent effects on students: they were primarily directed to the conditions of schooling that have been shown by research to help explain student learning. For the first time in memory, calls from scholars in organizational theory (Erickson, 1979) and educational policy (Boyd, 1983) to direct policy tools to educational effects were being heeded.[7] Problems with standards-raising, regulatory approaches to change notwithstanding, opportunity to learn (time plus content covered) remains the most powerful predictor of student learning.[8] Whether carried out in the most appropriate manner or not, or formed with the best available policy tool or not, the reform agenda could not help but bring about

---

[6]Critics have argued that the overall yield available from these types of reforms is not likely to be significant--or at least as significant as the yield from more fundamental reform initiatives. While attacks on the likely success of wave 1 measures are quite well developed, empirical evidence on the yield from more fundamental reforms is conspicuous by its absence.

[7]For the first time in history, legislators made a serious incursion into the technical core operations of schools "and other educational issues that had been reserved for local boards" (Guthrie & Kirst, 1988: 55; Kirst, 1984; Mitchell, 1984).

[8]See Murphy & Hallinger (1989) and Murphy (in press) for reviews.

some meaningful improvement by its redirection of attention, resources, and energy toward important conditions of learning.

Consistent with the line of analysis presented so far, an argument can be made that the reform agenda has been successful because it has tightened key organizational linkages in existing school structures, especially those dealing with curriculum and instruction. It has recoupled the various actors in education around the core mission of schooling. Analysts correctly maintain that there are other (perhaps even more appropriate) methods to strengthen organizational linkages (Firestone & Wilson, 1985) and point to the problems inherent in emphasizing bureaucratic couplings (Clark, 1987; Morgan, 1986; Sizer, 1984). However, many critics of wave 1 reforms have, in their analyses of the methods and tools employed, overlooked the significance of the recoupling itself. It is also possible that these linkages are the key to unlocking more fundamental types (wave 2 and wave 3) of educational change.

Conditions for success also appear to be more prevalent in the current as opposed to earlier eras of reform. The scope and momentum of the movement are unparalleled (McCarthy, in press; Odden & Marsh, 1988; Sedlak, et al., 1986). The attack on a host of problems has been more comprehensive, of greater concentrated intensity, and has spawned more activity than at any time in the past (Guthrie & Kirst, 1988; Underwood, in press). More importantly, to a large extent, the directions in which current reformers were pushing schools were quite consistent

with where many schools and districts preferred to go and with paths upon which many of them had already embarked.

> Thus, education reform, while state initiated nevertheless reinforced and bolstered--in the main--substantive foci on which local educators were already working. While there obviously were several differences between local foci on curriculum and instruction and state initiatives, the fact remains that both levels of government targeted the same issue for action (Odden & Marsh, in press).

Recipe for Failure Predicated Upon Inadequate Understanding of the Evolution of School Organizations

Analysts who believed that state-initiated, top-down reform would fail may have overlooked important changes in the organizational structure of schools that rendered them much more receptive to rationalistic, mandated change than had been the case in the past (Murphy, Hallinger, & Mesa, 1985). They may have formulated judgments on a set of conditions that no longer dominated the decision model. In short, schools were becoming more tightly linked in the 1970s and 1980s. The defining characteristics of loosely coupled systems were less stark than before.[9] Not only was our knowledge of the educational production function solidifying for the first time in history, but schools were acting as if they understood how to improve the teaching-learning process. Although subjected to vigorous criticism in both the academic and practitioner communities, tightly defined and uniform teaching models were being widely implemented in school systems throughout the

[9]We are not arguing that the particular types of tightening of organizational linkages discussed in the section are either good or bad, only that they are occurring and that they have important implications for the implementation of reform initiatives.

United States.[10] For the first time in memory curriculum was being specified *and* used to shape classroom instruction. Widespread implementation of programs designed to align curriculum objectives, instructional materials and strategies, and assessment tools helped lend a sense of surety to the technology of schooling--curricular and instructional validity became meaningful terms for practitioners. At the same time the goals or purposes of schooling were narrowing,[11] becoming clearer and more tightly linked to academics (Colvin, 1987).[12] Educators were beginning to talk about doing one task well rather than a host of activities in a mediocre fashion. Notions of measurement and accountability were being seriously discussed.[13] A focus on student outcomes, both in terms of quality and equity, became the defining characteristic of the widely accepted effective schools movement. Tests were no longer simply sources of information to file in students' cumulative folders but suppliers of data about the effectiveness of teachers, administrators, and schools (Boyd & Hartman, in press; Corbett & Wilson, in press). High stakes tests began to dominate the assessment landscape (McClellan, 1988; Shepard & Kreitzer, 1987).

---

[10]The widespread implementation of models of instruction based on the work of Hunter is a good example of this movement.

[11]A number of the critics have missed the point on this issue. It is not the reform movement that is leading to a narrowing of the educational agenda, but the narrowing of the educational agenda that is supporting reform proposals.

[12]See Goodlad (1984) for another point of view.

[13]Accountability was going beyond the development of new categories (e.g., student proficiency tests) for discredited ones (the high school diploma). Schools and the professionals who populated them were beginning to be assessed on measures of student outcomes.

An idea worthy of conjecture at this point is that the changing nature of the organization of schools may have greatly enhanced the potential for successful implementation of top-down reform strategies. Information about the inappropriateness of top-down change and the need for buy-in, ownership, and bottom-up strategies was derived from studies of reform and improvement in loosely linked schools. Under the conditions that characterize loosely coupled organizations, regulatory approaches are poor mechanisms to infuse reform throughout a system. Goodwill and personal ownership are essential prerequisites for change in these situations. Loose coupling, however, was not nearly so dominant a part of the fabric of school organizations in the 1980s as it had been when earlier mandated change strategies were found to have produced so limited an array of effects. Many critics who argued that reform would fail may have missed this important evolution in school organizational structure. It is possible that they predicted an effect from a set of conditions that were no longer operant.

Claims for Failure Based on Limited Views of Policy Tools

If it is possible that critics based their arguments on organizational propositions that, at least to some extent, were incongruent with school systems in the 1980s, it is also conceivable that they drew lessons about implementation from types of policies different from those being employed in the current reform movement. According to Odden and Marsh (in press), data supporting the "no effect" school of thought were drawn from implementation studies on "redistributive policies"--those that "require local educators to focus on issues to which they had

not been giving sufficient attention." Because these policies require school people to do things differently, allocate important resources in new ways, and often challenge fundamental values and deeply ingrained work patterns, it is nearly impossible to expect them to be implemented successfully in the absence of strong local support. And this, of course, is exactly what was found in earlier studies on school reform and improvement. However, Odden and Marsh correctly note that redistributive policies were not the primary mechanisms dominating the reform agenda of the 1980s. Because the current reform agenda focused on "developmental policies"--"initiatives in areas in which local governments (school districts in the case of education) are already involved" (Odden & Marsh, in press)--top-down changes were much more likely to be implemented successfully than in earlier eras when redistributive policies were emphasized. It is possible that many critics who predicted that the movement of the 1980s would fail largely missed this point.

> At least in part because of this redirective nature, redistributive programs have a much more contentious implementation process and take longer to "put into place." Since most of the "conventional wisdom" about education policy implementation was drawn from research on the early years of redistributive policy implementation, when local resistance was strongest, it was inappropriate to apply it to the more developmental education reform initiatives (Odden & Marsh, in press).

Failure as an Artifact of the Definition of Success

The belief that the reform agenda would fail grew to a certain degree from the use of inappropriate measures of success and faulty timelines for assessment.

Critics ignored important aspects of the same organizational literature (e.g., schools as loosely linked systems) from which they constructed the funeral pyre for educational reform. The work of such scholars as Meyer and Rowan (1975) reveals that the "rational" response of a decoupled organization in trouble is to create new, more legitimate categories (e.g., competency tests for teachers) to replace discredited ones (e.g., teacher credentialing), without undue concern for whether the new categories increase anything but acceptance of the legitimacy of the categories themselves.[14] In order to be consistent, those who employ loose linkages as an explanation for the probable failure of wave 1 reform initiatives should entertain the proposition that the passage of the reform measures themselves is an important criterion of success, regardless of whether changes occur in schools and classrooms.

Yet few of the critics seem to be willing to define reform success in this manner. Furthermore, they adopt highly rational lenses to scrutinize the reform agenda, even as they discredit the power and usefulness of rational models to explain organizational phenomena (for an exception see Cornbleth, 1986). Definitions of success look quite different depending upon the perspective from which activities are examined. What would pass for success using a bargaining or a cultural model would most likely be seen as only a partial success, at best, from a structural-functional frame of reference. Critics grounded in non-rational perspectives of organizations have, by and large, not analyzed the actual or

---

[14]Indeed, there is evidence that some of the reforms may fit this pattern. For example, Ellwein, Glass, & Smith (1988: 8) reached the conclusion that "competency tests and standards function as symbolic and political gestures, not as instrumental reforms." On the other hand, Odden and Marsh (in press) found evidence of substantive rather than symbolic change in the implementation of reforms in California.

potential impact of the reform agenda in a manner consistent with their primary orientations--they have emphasized instrumental analysis to the near exclusion of other frameworks for assessment (McLaughlin, 1987 for an eloquent analysis of this phenomenom).

To make matters worse, analysts often select instrumental criteria more on the basis of personal values than on that of the inherent structure of the reforms. For example, critics are apt to label the reform agenda a failure because it has not led to improvement in students' higher order thinking skills as measured on various tests. The problem here is that the criterion selected to define success--increased scores on tests measuring higher order thinking skills--although rational and instrumental, is not only decoupled from the instrumentality of the reform, but also overlooks important evidence that the intent of reform initiatives--increased scores on tests of basic skills--is being realized (Snider, 1989). It is not surprising that reform proposals should be judged inadequate if only very narrow instrumental conceptions of success--and ones that are often decoupled from reform intent--are employed.

Finally, it is important to remember that many critics use a very short time perspective when evaluating reform efforts, thereby overlooking the importance of successive approximation in the process of achieving more fundamental changes. For example, a number of observers have lamented the fact that reform policies in the area of testing are failing because they have focused interest on those matters of schooling that are of least importance (i.e., basic skills). In addition to

serving as a textbook example of replacing personal values for reform intent, such assessments generally ignore the important role that wave 1 policies in the area of testing have played in focusing attention on outcome measures in general. They also fail to recognize the possibility that the types of tests they prefer are more likely to become a reality in the future because these initial policy tools were enacted, implemented, and debated.

Predictions of Failure Neglecting Shifts in Values

The speculations presented so far raise the possibility that analysts who predicted little or no effect from wave 1 reform measures may have missed the target because they misdiagnosed the context in which the reform agenda was enacted. It is also possible that they failed to take into account two important shifts--in the organizational structure of schools and in the type of policy tool emphasized--that made top-down change more likely to succeed than it had in the past. Finally, it is worth considering that the definitions critics used to reach their conclusions may have been flawed, in terms of both fidelity to the predominant models of analysis they championed and consistency with the intents of the reform agenda itself. Although analysis of this last point is somewhat less firm than that of the others, it is possible that predictions of "no effect" may have missed subtle shifts, possibly portending significant changes, in the fundamental values underlying schooling and teaching. For example, while egalitarian aspects of reform initiatives have not fared particularly well, they are receiving more attention and being implemented on a larger scale than our earlier treatment of values would suggest.

The same can be said about other measures that differentiate schools and teachers, for example, parental choice. It may be that wave 1 reforms have been enacted at a time when, even though they run counter to extant values of education, they are consistent with an incipient metamorphosis of those values.[15]

Conclusion

In this paper some speculations were developed to help explain the possible success of wave 1 reform initiatives. Positions supporting the generally accepted view that educational reform in the 1980s would fail were first examined. Beginning with the evidence of successful change efforts in California and South Carolina, some preliminary conjectures were formed to explain how reforms that were rejected out of hand as unlikely to be implemented, let alone have a positive impact on schools and students, may be yielding more benefits than had been anticipated. The possibility was raised that, for a variety of reasons, top-down change strategies that had faired so poorly in the past were positioned to be more effective this time around. The overarching context for reform was judged to be much more supportive of mandated change than most analysts had once anticipated. Continuity between state-initiated proposals and local interests[16] was

[15]If this line of analysis is accurate, it supports one of the basic positions of this paper: that wave 1 reforms are an essential first step in the evolution to more fundamental types of educational change. It also suggests that successive approximation of reform trends be given more serious consideration.

[16]Odden & Marsh (in press) talk about this as reform legitimizing local initiative.

seen as a key element of this contextual environment as was the focus on issues related to emerging research on student learning.

It was also suggested that shifts in the structure of schools (from more loosely linked to more tightly linked, especially in the core technology); the policy framework employed in propelling improvement efforts (from redistributive to developmental policies); and, to a lesser extent, the underlying values of schooling (from a hardened to a softening of fundamental norms and values) may have occurred over the last 15 years. Each of these movements may have helped create a more favorable context for state-initiated change than had previously been the case. Within this new context, many improvement efforts that heretofore would have withered and died took root. The possibility was also considered that the expected, and sometimes perceived, failure of wave 1 reforms was due, at least in part, to the rather questionable definitions of success employed by critics. Particularly troubling has been the emphasis on highly rationalistic evaluation frameworks by analysts who minimize the value of rational-structural approaches to the understanding of organizations.

As noted earlier, while it is premature to claim that wave 1 reforms were or are a complete success, it appears that what successes they have enjoyed has been largely ignored by the academic community--unanticipated, largely unnoticed when they occur, and often explained away when they are seen. A scholar of organizational theory (Lotto, 1983) once noted that "believing is seeing." It is worth speculating that this is the case with analyses of wave 1 reforms in the 1980s. Too

many critics, often well-armed with useful historical data, concluded that top-down reforms simply could not work. It is possible that they therefore allowed themselves to overlook important shifts in the context of education that might have made mandated change more likely to succeed. Also, by filtering what they did see about the reform movement through their own beliefs, it is possible that they came to be overly pessimistic about the impact of educational improvement in the 1980s.

REFERENCES

Boyd, W. L. (1987, Summer). "Public Education's Last Hurrah? Schizophrenia, Amnesia, and Ignorance in School Politics." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9(2), 85-100.

Boyd, W. L. (1983, March). "What School Administrators Do and Don't Do: Implications for Effective Schools." *The Canadian Administrator*, 22(6), 1-4.

Boyd, W. L., & Hartman, W. T. (in press). "The Politics of Educational Productivity." In O. Monk & J. Underwood (Eds.), *Distributing Educational Resources Within Nations, States, School Districts, and Schools*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.

Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. (1986, May). *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. Author.

Chubb, J. E. (1988, Winter). "Why the Current Wave of School Reform Will Fail." *The Public Interest*, (90), 28-49.

Clark, D. L. (1987, August). *Thinking About Leaders and Followers: Restructuring the Roles of Principals and Teachers*. Paper presented at the Conference on Restructuring Schooling for Quality and Education, Trinity University, San Antonio.

Colvin, R. (1987, August/September). "Studying the Effects of Reform." *Educational Researcher*, 16(6), 7.

Combs, A. W.. (1988, February). "New Assumptions for Educational Reform." *Educational Leadership*, 45(5), 38-40.

Coombs, F. S. (1987, April). "*The Effects of Increased State Control on Local School District Governance*." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C.

Corbett, H. D., Firestone, W. A., & Rossman, G. B. (1987, November). "Resistance to Planned Change and the Sacred in School Cultures." *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 23(4), 36-59.

Corbett, H. D., & Wilson, B. L. (in press). "Statewide Testing and Local Improvement: An Oxymoron?" In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The Reform of American Public Education in the 1980s: Perspectives and Cases*. Berkeley: McCutchan.

Cornbleth, C. (1986, April). "Ritual and Rationality in Teacher Education Reform." *Educational Researcher*, 15(4), 5-14.

Cuban, L. (1984, November). "School Reform by Remote Control: SB 813 in California." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 66(3), 213-215.

Cusick, P. (1983). *"The Egalitarian Ideal and the American High School."* New York: Longman.

Downs, A. (1967). *Inside Bureaucracy*. Boston: Little Brown and Company.

Doyle, D. P., & Hartle, T. W. (1985, September). "Leadership in Education: Governors, Legislators, and Teachers." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 67(1), 21-27.

Ellwein, M. C., Glass, G. V., & Smith, M. L. (1988, November). "Standards of Competence: Propositions on the Nature of Testing Reforms." *Educational Researcher*, 17(18), 4-9.

Erickson, D. A. (1979, March). "Research on Educational Administration: The State-of-the-Art." *Educational Researcher*, 8, 9-14.

Firestone, W. A. (in press). "Continuity and Incrementalism After All: State Responses to the excellence movement." In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The Reform of American Public Education in the 1980s: Perspectives and Cases*. Berkeley: McCutchan.

Firestone, W. A., & Wilson, B. L. (1985a, Spring). "Using Bureaucratic and Cultural Linkages to Improve Instruction: The Principal's Contribution." *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 21(2), 7-30.

Frymier, J. (1987, September). "Bureaucracy and the Neutering of Teachers." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 69(1), 9-14.

Ginsberg, R., & Wimpelberg, R. K. (1987, Winter). "Educational Change by Commission: Attempting 'Trickle Down Reform'." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9(4), 344-360.

Goffman, E. (1969). "The Characteristics of Total Institutions." In A. Etzioni (Ed.), *A Sociological Reader on Complex Organizations*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.

Goodlad, J. I. (1984). *A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Green, J. (1987). *The Next Wave: A Synopsis of Recent Education Reform Reports.* Denver: Educational Commission of the States.

Grossman, P., Kirst, M.W., Negash, & Schmidt-Posnere, J. (1985, July). *Curricular Change in California Comprehensive High Schools 1982-83 to 1984-85.* Berkeley: Policy Analysis for California Education.

Guthrie, J.W., & Kirst, M. W. (1988, March). *Conditions of Education in California 1988.* Berkeley: Policy Analysis for California Education. (Policy Paper No. 88-3-2).

Hawley, W. D. (1988, November). "Missing Pieces of the Educational Reform Agenda: Or Why the First and Second Waves May Miss the Boat." *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 24(4), 416-437.

Holmes Group. (1986, April). *Tomorrow's Teachers.* East Lansing, MI: Author. Jordan, K. F., & McKeown, M. P. (in press).

Kearnes, D. L. (1988b). "A Business Perspective on American Schooling." *Education Week*, 7(30), 32, 24.

Kearnes, D. L. (1988a). "An Education Recovery Plan for America." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 69(8), 565-570.

Kirst, M. W. (1988, 22 June). "On Reports and Reform: *Nation at Risk* Assessed." *Education Week*, 7(39), 40.

Kirst, M. W. (1987, October). "PEER, An Interview with Michael Kirst." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 60(2), 161-164.

Kirst, M. (1984, November). "The Changing Balance in State and Local Power to Control Education." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 66(3), 189-191.

Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lotto, L. S. (1983, Winter). "Believing is Seeing." *Organizational Theory Dialogue*, 3(1), 6-26.

Malen, B., & Hart, A. W. (1987, April). *Shaping Career Ladder Reform: The Influence of Teachers on the Policy Making Process.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C.

McCarthy, M. M. (in press). "Teacher Testing Programs." In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The Reform of American Public Education in the 1980s: Perspectives and Cases*. Berkeley: McCutchan.

McClellan, M. C. (1988, June). "Testing and Reform." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 69(10), 768-771.

Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1975). *Notes on the Structure of Educational Organizations: Revised version*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco.

Mitchell, D. E. (1984, Summer). "Educational Policy Analysis: The State of the Art." *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 20(3), 129-160.

Mitchell, Douglas E., & Encarnation, D. J. (1984, May). "Alternative State Policy Mechanisms for Influencing School Performance." *Educational Researcher*, 13(5), 4-11.

Morgan, G. (1986). *Images of Organization*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Murphy, J. (in press). "Principal Instructional Leadership." In L. S. Lotto & P. W. Thurston (Eds.), *Recent Advances in Educational Administration*. Volume 1. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Murphy, J. (1989a, February). "Is There Equity in Educational Reform?" Educational Leadership, 46(5), 32-33.

Murphy, J. (1989b, March). *Educational Reform and Equity: A Reexamination of Prevailing Thought*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.

Murphy, J. (1989c, in press). "The Educational Reform Movement of the 1980s: A Comprehensive Analysis." In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The Reform of American Education in the 1980s: Perspectives and Cases*. Berkeley: McCutchan.

Murphy, J., & Hallinger, P. (1989, March-April). "Equity as Access to Learning: Curricular and Instructional Treatment Differences." *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 21(2), 129-149.

Murphy, M., Hallinger, P., & Mesa, R. P. (1985, Summer). "School Effectiveness: Checking Progress and Assumptions and Developing a Role for State and Federal Government." *Teachers College Record*, 86(4), 615-641.

Odden, A. (1989, March). *The Future of Colleges of Education and Human Development.* Presentation made to the faculty of Peabody College, Vanderbilt University.

Odden, A., & Marsh, D. (in press). "Local Response to the 1980s State Education Reforms: New patterns of Local/State Interaction." In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The Reform of American Public Education in the 1980s: Perspectives and Cases.* Berkeley: McCutchan.

Odden, A., & Marsh, D. (1988, April). "How Comprehensive Reform Legislation Can Improve Secondary Schools." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 69(8), 593-598.

Olson, L. (1989, 22 February). "Governors Say Investment in Children Can Curb 'Long-Term Costs' for States." *Education Week*, 8(22), 10.

Perry, N. J. (1988, July 4). "The Education Crisis: What Business Can Do." *Fortune*, 38-41.

Peterson, P. E. (n.d.). *Economic and Policy Trends Affecting Teacher Effectiveness in Mathematics and Science.* Unpublished.

Plank, D. N., & Ginsberg, R. (in press). "Catch the Wave: Reform Commissions and School Reform." In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The Reform of American Public Education in the 1980s: Perspectives and Cases.* Berkeley: McCutchan.

Rossmiller, R. A. (1986, Winter). "Some Contemporary Trends and Their Implications for the Preparation of School Administrators." *UCEA Review*, 27(1), 2-3.

Sedlak, M. W., Wheeler, C. W., Pullin, D. C., & Cusick, P. A. (1986). *Selling Students Short: Classroom Bargains and Academic Reform in the American High School.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Sizer, T. R. (1984). *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Smith, M. L., & Shepard, L. A. (1987, October). "What Doesn't Work: Explaining Policies of Retention in the Early Grades." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 69(2), 129-134.

Snider, W. (1989, 22 February). "NAEP Finds Basic Skills Up, Higher-Order Skills Lacking." *Education Week*, 8(22), 7.

South Carolina State Board of Education (1988). *What is the Penny Buying for South Carolina?* Columbia, SC: Author.

"State Fiscal Policy and Education Reform," In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The Reform of American Public Education in the 1980s: Perspectives and Cases.* Berkeley: McCutchan.

Timar, T. B., & Kirp, D. L. (1988, Summer). "State Efforts to Reform Schools: Treading Between a Regulatory Swamp and an English Garden." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 10(2), 75-88.

Underwood, J. (1988). "State Legislative Responses to Educational Reform Literature." In L. S. Lotto and P. W. Thurston (Eds.), *Recent Advances in Educational Administration*, Volume 1. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Walker, R. (1988, 2 March). "Educators, Lawmakers Rap Kentucky Governor's Budget." *Education Week*, 7(26).